



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Accomplishment Report

The **Alpena Fishery Resources Office (Alpena FRO)** is located in Alpena, Michigan and works to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fishery and Ecosystem goals within Lake Huron, Western Lake Erie, and connecting waters of the St. Marys River, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Activities include Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Science and Technology, Partnerships and Accountability, Public Use, and Workforce Management – all of which are conducted in alignment with the Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future. The station is one of many field offices located within Region 3, the Great Lakes Big Rivers Region.

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

St. Marys River Lake Sturgeon Telemetry Project a Success

*Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist*

Field work continued through July for the St. Marys River lake sturgeon project. Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski obtained funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to implant and track lake sturgeon within the St. Marys River. Lake Superior State University (LSSU), Bay Mills Indian Community, and the Soo Area Sportsman Club are partners on this project. The goal of this project was to capture adult lake sturgeon and surgically implant sonic telemetry tags in adult fish and identify critical habitat within the St. Marys River.

Funds obtained from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation were used to purchase the necessary equipment and hire a student in the Service's Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). Biological Science Aid Meghan Kline was selected as the STEP employee and began working on May 15. Kline has been overseeing and coordinating all field activities with partners and volunteers working on this project. In addition to the partners, we have had 30 different volunteers involved in this project. The volunteers have either worked on the Service's vessel during field activities or provided their vessel to complete that day.



Since the week of May 15 set-lines have been fished weekly in various reaches of the St. Marys River. To date, a total of 299 set lines have been lifted yielding 73 lake sturgeon. Basic biological data were recorded from all lake sturgeon encountered and 10 fish have had a sonic telemetry tag implanted. Lake sturgeon received a sonic telemetry tag if their total length exceeded 50 inches.

Several lake sturgeon captured in June and July exceeded the 50 inch minimum but did not receive a sonic telemetry tag due to elevated water temperatures. Once the water temperature exceeded 20 degrees Celsius all surgery ceased in order to minimize stress on these fish. Of the 10 fish that have had a sonic telemetry tag implanted, we have been able to track their movement on a regular basis during the summer.

Most of the fish have remained relatively close to the initial capture location. A few fish, however, have moved quite a distance within a few days. One fish was at large for several weeks, but LSSU staff were able to locate that fish about 5 miles down river from the initial capture location. That particular fish has since moved back up stream and has been found quite close to its initial capture location. Alpena FRO and LSSU staff will continue to track the implanted fish at least weekly until the river freezes. After the river opens up again next spring, we will begin looking for the fish again.

This project was funded for one year, however, additional funds are being sought to continue this important work. The battery life of the tags is four years. Hopefully, the implanted fish will lead us to spawning habitat within the St. Marys River in subsequent years. If continued funding is obtained we plan on implanting up to 10 more fish next season.

This work is an example of Alpena's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", "Partnerships and Accountability", and "Cooperation with Native American Tribes".

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Aquatic Habitat Restoration Tour in Ohio

*Submitted by Susan Wells
Fish and Wildlife Biologist*

Biologist Wells visited potential Fish Passage and Coastal Program projects in Ohio during the week of July 24th. Representatives from the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW), Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, Chagrin Watershed Coordinators, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Ohio Partners Program and Alpena FRO spent 2 days touring potential stream restoration sites. Three dams within the Cleveland area were viewed by the group as good fish passage projects. One of the dams viewed, on Euclid Creek, has already received funding in 2006 from the Service's Fish Passage Program and is scheduled for removal in 2007. Another dam upstream from the funded Euclid Creek project is a larger structure owned by Ohio Department of Transportation and would take a few years to coordinate before removal would be an option. The last dam visited by the group was within the Chagrin River Watershed. It is a

privately owned structure that was created to pond water for the local community but is now being looked at with the option of removal versus the cost of maintenance because it is filling with sediment. A fourth dam, within the Findlay area, was visited by the Service and ODOW. The dam is owned by ODOW and they are hoping to provide fish passage to upstream waters. It is located on the Auglaize River, a major tributary to the Maumee River. This proposed project involves cutting the head of the dam and installing rock rapids below to allow fish to migrate above the dam.



Two other projects that involve in-stream work were viewed including restoration of delta islands at the mouth of Euclid Creek which has potential for funding through the Coastal Program. Upon conclusion of the tour, Biologist Wells identified one new Fish Passage project for potential funding in 2007 and other projects that have potential for funding in future years as partners start to come together.

This is an example of collaboration between government and non-profit organizations that will benefit fish and wildlife resources by enhancing aquatic habitat. This project provides fish passage assistance for northern pike, bass, and darter species into reaches of the Cuyahoga, Chagrin, and Auglaize River Watersheds. This project involves collaboration between many partners and addresses the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future priority of "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" and "Partnerships and Accountability".

Partnerships and Accountability

Near Shore Fish Study Continues in the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge

*Submitted by James Boase
Fishery Biologist*

As part of the Service's Challenge Cost Share Grant Program (CCS) biologists from Alpena FRO, Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), Michigan DNR Lake Erie Management Unit, Michigan DNR Lake St. Clair Research Station, and USGS Great Lakes Science Center teamed up to conduct the second fishery survey within the recently established Refuge. The Refuge boundary includes Michigan waters of the Lower Detroit River and Lake Erie. The last time a similar fishery survey was conducted in that area of the Great Lakes was

back in the early 1980's. Since that time many changes have taken place, specifically the addition of exotic species that have likely displaced or reduced the numbers and diversity of native species.

The first part of the survey took place last year in September with efforts focusing on wetland areas located along western Lake Erie. The second part of the survey was conducted this year to identify wetland areas being used as nursery areas during the month of July. Our primary goal with this project was to provide baseline information about what species, both native and exotic, are using the remaining wetland complexes found within Refuge waters in the lower Detroit River.

The Refuge provides some of the last remaining natural wetland areas available in the Detroit River and Western Lake Erie. Refuge manager John Hartig and DNR Biologist Joe Robison continue to meet with landowners within the Refuge Boundaries seeking management agreements to protect the remaining wetlands. Those nursery areas are critical to the early life stages of many species of sport fish as well as some state listed species. Historical records from past surveys have identified over thirty species of fish using those wetland habitats for either spawning or nursery areas.

At a planning meeting in March 2006 researchers and managers met to identify locations in the lower Detroit River that were considered important nursery habitat and to identify the dates to sample. During the September 2005 survey along western Lake Erie (using both electro-fishing and seining) 46 different fish species were collected. We were able to demonstrate that some state listed species as well as many economically valuable sport fish species (walleye, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike, and other sunfishes) were using those locations as nursery areas. In 2006 sampling took place in July, earlier in the season with the rationale that many of the species spawn early in the spring and would still be residing in the nursery areas. With the exception of one location in western Lake Erie all sampling took place in the lower Detroit River.

Small mesh fyke nets were used in 2006 in addition to electro-fishing and seining gear. Sampling consisted of 14 seine hauls, electro-fishing at 24 locations, and 29 fyke net sets. We caught a total of 11,814 fish representing 55 species from 15 families. Two species, the silver lamprey and the state listed silver chub, were collected last year but not found this year. Ten new species were captured this year that were not represented in last year's catch including alewife, muskellunge, rainbow trout, striped shiner, honeyhead chub, black buffalo, smallmouth buffalo, silver redhorse, northern hog sucker, and white crappie. Again this year a number of economically important species of sportfish were using the limited number of wetland areas as nursery grounds. This effort is a critical first step in identifying the current status of fish species within the newly created Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and will aid the refuge with establishing its Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

This effort provided a unique opportunity to create new partnerships with both governmental and non-governmental agencies to achieve common Great Lakes management objectives. Maintaining these collaborative relationships allows for the most efficient use of limited human and fiscal resources. This project is consistent with the "Partnerships and Accountability",

“Aquatic Species Conservation and Management”, and “Leadership in Science and Technology” focus areas of the Fisheries Program’s Vision for the Future.

Alpena FRO Participates in Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources Event

*Submitted by Jerry McClain
Fishery Biologist*

Project Leader McClain participated in the annual Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources event day on July 23 in Alpena. This annual event brings journalists from around the U.S. and Canada to tour locations in the Great Lakes where a variety of natural resource issues can be discussed and, in some cases, viewed first hand. The intent of the event is to stimulate interest by practicing journalists to do stories on regional natural resource issues. This year’s event focused on issues in northern lower Michigan with primary focus on Lake Huron. Participants in the event included print journalists from Michigan and other Great Lakes states, some western states, and Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. In addition, a radio journalist from Michigan Public Radio also participated. The panel discussion that McClain participated in dealt with the changing food web in Lake Huron and terms and implementation of the 2000 Consent Decree. Other stops on the tour included the Hammond Bay Biological Station and the Kirtland Warbler management areas near Grayling.

Participation in outreach events such as this enables the Service to educate the public on our roles and responsibilities as the principal federal agency for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. In addition, the event increases the visibility of the Alpena FRO for fishery management assistance activities in this region of the Great Lakes. This activity is consistent with and supportive of the “Partnerships and Accountability” and “Public Use” priorities of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Alpena FRO Completes Preparation for the Commercial Fishers Appreciation Dinner

*Submitted by Adam Kowalski
Fish & Wildlife Biologist*

During July 2005, Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski finalized details for the 9th Annual Commercial Fishers Appreciation Dinner. The Alpena FRO annually hosts this dinner for Michigan state-licensed and tribal commercial fishers that assist us with a lake sturgeon tagging project in Lake Huron. Kowalski reserved a pavilion at a city park in Bay City to hold the dinner and made other arrangements for the event. A number of prizes and gifts such as life vests, rain gear, t-shirts, and can coolers are purchased for the event to show our appreciation. All costs for the event are paid for with volunteer funds.

Commercial fishers encounter lake sturgeon as by-catch during normal fishing operations for lake whitefish, yellow perch, and channel catfish. The fishers volunteer time by tagging and collecting biological information on lake sturgeon by-catch. Currently, 10 commercial fishers operating 16 boats participate in the study. Approximately 430 lake sturgeon have been tagged since the program began in 1995.

This partnership between the Service and Lake Huron commercial fishers to track and monitor lake sturgeon has been in place since 1995, and is consistent with the “Partnerships and Accountability” priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future to develop and improve long-term partnerships.

Public Use

Outreach Event Held at Purdy Fisheries during the Annual Port Huron to Mackinaw Sailboat Race

*Submitted by James Boase
Fishery Biologist*

The annual Port Huron to Mackinaw sailboat race begins in the headwaters region of the St. Clair River at the southern most end of Lake Huron. The starting point is near the cities of Port Huron on the U.S. side and Point Edward on the Canadian side. Each year tens of thousands of spectators line both sides of the St. Clair River and the Lake Huron shoreline to watch the start of the race.



At Point Edward the Purdy family runs a commercial fishing operation that sells fresh fish to the public and also has a seasonal outdoor restaurant facility for serving fish dinners. Purdy Fisheries is located in Point Edward along the St. Clair River near the starting location. Each year thousands of spectators come to the facility to witness the race while enjoying an outdoor dinner at Purdy’s restaurant. The Purdy facility has multiple venues for viewing live species of fish including lake sturgeon. The outdoor dining area is situated along the banks of the St. Clair River adjacent to one of the largest lake sturgeon spawning reef located in the Great Lakes. Within the outdoor dining area is a 12,000 gallon aquarium that houses representatives of the local fish community including lake sturgeon. Fishery Biologists James Boase from Alpena FRO traveled to Point Edward to attend this year’s event which was held on July 15th.

While guests were treated to fresh caught lake trout, walleye and perch for dinner, Boase was invited to present information about research taking place in the St. Clair River and Lake Huron.

Following dinner many guests were taken to the fish raceways housed within the Purdy facility for an opportunity to handle live lake sturgeon. For most guests this was the highlight of the event.

Alpena FRO has worked on a number of research projects with the Purdy family including telemetry projects in the St. Clair River and the Lake Huron tagging study. Findings from those research projects continue to broaden our understanding of lake sturgeon in this part of the Great Lakes. This outreach event provided an excellent opportunity for Alpena FRO to highlight the continued spirit of cooperation between the Service and its partners towards the rehabilitation of lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes.

This event provided an opportunity to interact with the public, resource partners and to explain the Service's mission and efforts to protect and restore fishery resources in the Great Lakes. Specifically, information was provided about the efforts of the Service and its partners to rehabilitate native lake sturgeon populations in the Great Lakes and the role that the Fishery Resources Offices have in this endeavor. This research event supports the "Public Use", "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Friday Night Downtown! in Alpena

*Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist*

On July 21, Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt staffed a Service information booth at the Alpena Friday Night Downtown! festival. Friday Night Downtown! is a city sponsored family event held every Friday night during the month of July in the downtown city streets of Alpena. Each Friday combines a different mix of live musical entertainment, kid's games, food booths, pony rides, public safety demonstrations by local law enforcement and emergency services agencies, and informational booths by local businesses, civic groups, and governmental agencies. Woldt distributed Service pamphlets, children's coloring books, and posters and spoke with over 200 visitors to explain the role of the Service and the Alpena FRO in conserving natural resources. Topics discussed included lake trout rehabilitation, lake trout stocking, potential impacts of double crested cormorants, sea lamprey control, the National Fish Hatchery program, aquatic nuisance species control, fish passage, endangered species, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, lake sturgeon tagging and tracking, lake whitefish population viability, and lake trout movement patterns.

Alpena Friday Night Downtown! is a large outreach event that allows Alpena FRO staff to meet and interact with large numbers of local community members to provide information about Service programs. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of implementing educational and outreach activities to educate public regarding Service activities under the "Public Use" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.



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For more information on Alpena FRO programs and activities or to view other station reports visit our website located at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena/>.